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AN ANTHOLOGY OF VERSE

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WHEELS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF VERSE

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WHEELS : AN ANTHOLOGY OF VERSE
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Victor·Tait·Perowne
Arnold·James
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Nancy·Cunard
Osbert·Sitwell
Edith·Sitwell
Sacheverell·Sitwell
E. Wyndham·Tennant
Iris·Tree·

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

"*In Bad Taste.*"

The platitudinous multitude advance,
They tear their hair and speak with bated breath,
And some are young—tho' prematurely aged,
And others old—tho' desperately young.
Sometimes they roar out biblical abuse,
At other times they wrap their ranting thoughts
In the fair-woven garment of hypocrisy,
Or roll their silly eyes,—or uplifted
Thank God they are not like to Publicans.
But most I love their favourite axiom
That age is but a virtue, youth a sin:—
"This line is gloomy and this view is false.
Life is a thing of joy and platitudes.
Oh! to be simple now that Spring is here!
Play Oranges and Lemons, Nuts and May,
And sing and gambol through a joyous day.—
When *we* were young, we danced upon the hills
In tall top-hats and patent-leather shoes
To the wild music of a mandoline.
All decent youth should sing 'the Rosary'
In a sweet, simple, untrained tenor voice,
Or softly whistle 'Songs of Araby':—
Then would you grow to a malign old age,

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Watching your sons a-cricket on the green
And hear your daughter's cello in the dusk.
These are the joys the future holds in store.
Ah! we still live in sweet simplicity
And hear the twittering of chaffinches;
We read our 'Country Life' and worship 'Punch'
(A journal strong, severe, yet humorous)
Full of clean humour and of simple fun,
Containing charming jokes of rustic life
Displaying with pride, their childish ignorance,
—And ours. Life may be less complex. Ah well!
A mere two thousand years have slipped away
And left us simple, sweet Barbarity.
The chaffinches still sing, and still the Church
Pursues its mission of Repentant Hope.
But you are young—
And youth is sad."
Meanwhile
The World's giant wheels revolve and flatten out
The road for Fate—the path for Destiny.
A myriad lives are but a grain of dust
To mark a turning—or the thought of one.
Along this royal straight avenue of Time,
From the dim splendour of the ages past,—
Deck'd out in golden plumes, and wreathed with flowers,
On a triumphal car, and with a cavalcade,
Rides Moloch, God of Blood:
And in his hand a fingered treatise on Simplicity.

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WHEELS.

I SOMETIMES think that all our thoughts are wheels
Rolling forever through the painted world,
Moved by the cunning of a thousand clowns
Dressed paper-wise, with blatant rounded masks,
That take their multi-coloured caravans
From place to place, and act and leap and sing,
Catching the spinning hoops when cymbals clash.
And one is dressed as Fate, and one as Death,
The rest that represent Love, Joy and Sin,
Join hands in solemn stage-learnt ecstasy,
While Folly beats a drum with golden pegs,
And mocks that shrouded Jester called Despair.
The dwarves and other curious satellites,
Voluptuous-mouthed, with slyly-pointed steps,
Strut in the circus while the people stare.—
And some have sober faces white with chalk,
And roll the heavy wheels all through the streets
Of sleeping hearts, with ponderance and noise
Like weary armies on a solemn march.—

Wheels.

Now in the scented gardens of the night,
Where we are scattered like a pack of cards,
Our words are turned to spokes that thoughts may roll
And form a jangling chain around the world,
(Itself a fabulous wheel controlled by Time
Over the slow incline of centuries.)
So dreams and prayers and feelings born of sleep
As well as all the sun-gilt pageantry
Made out of summer breezes and hot noons,
Are in the great revolving of the spheres
Under the trampling of their chariot wheels.

THE BEGINNING.

GREAT spheres of fire, to which the sun is nought
Pass thund'ring round our world. A golden mist—
The margin to the universe,—falls round
The verges of our vision. Rocks ablaze
Leap upward to the sun, or fall beneath
The rush of our rapidity, that seems
Catastrophy, and not the joyous birth
Of yet another star. The air is full
Of clashing colours, full of sights and sounds
Too plain and loud for men to heed or hear,—
The cosmic cries of pain that follow birth:
A multi-coloured world.
The scorching heat
Surpasses all the equatorial days:
Steam rises from the surface of the sea.
Gigantic rainbow mists resemble forms
That bring to mind strange elemental sprites

The Beginning.

Exulting in the chaos of creation.
They glide above the tumult-ridden sea
Which now is shaken as are autumn leaves;
Great hollows open and reveal its depths—
Devoid of any form of life or death.—
Then wave on wave it gathers strength again
And shakes a mountain, splits it to the base
(Still weak from struggles as a new-born babe).
Then night comes on, and shows the flaming path
Of all the rocks that vainly seek the sun.
Broad as the arch of space, a myriad moons
Sail slowly by the sea; the glowing world
Shows up the pallor of their ivory.—
The din grows greater from the universe:
There rises up the smell of fire and iron,—
Not dreary like the smell of burnt-out things,
But like the smell of some gigantic forge—
Cheerful, of good intent, and full of life.

Now all the joyous cries of sea and earth,
The universal harmonies of birth,
Rise up to haunt the slumber of their god.

THE END.

ROUND the great ruins crawl those things of slime ;—
Green ruins lichenous and scarred by moss,—
An evil lichen that proclaims world doom,
Like blood dried brown upon a dead man's face.
And nothing moves save those monstrosities
Armoured and grey and of a monster size.

But now, a thing passed through the cloying air
With flap and clatter of its scaly wings—
As if the whole world echoed from some storm.
One scarce could see it in this dim green light
Till suddenly it swooped and made a dart
And swept away one of those things of slime,
Just as a hawk might sweep upon its prey.
Then there were horrid noises, cries of pain
Which only made one feel a deep disgust.
It seems as if the light grows dimmer yet—
No radiance from the dreadful green above,

The End.

Only a lustrous light or iridescence
As if from off a carrion-fly,—surrounds
That vegetation which is never touched
By any breeze. The air is thick and brings
The tainted subtle sweetness of decay.—
Where, yonder, lies the noisome river-course,
There shows a faintly phosphorescent glow.—
Long writhing bodies fall and twist and rise,
And one can hear them playing in the mud.
Upon the ruined walls there gleam and shine
The track of those grey vast monstrosities—
As some gigantic snail had crawled along.

All round the shining bushes waver lines
Suggesting shadows, slight and grey, but full
Of that which makes one nigh to dead with fear.

Watch how those awful shadows culminate
And dance in one long wish to hurt the world.

A world that now is past all agony!

PROGRESS.

THE city's heat is like a leaden pall—
Its lowered lamps glow in the midnight air
Like mammoth orange moths that flit and flare
Through the dark tapestry of night. The tall
Black houses crush the creeping beggars down,
Who walk beneath and think of breezes cool,
Of silver bodies bathing in a pool,
Or trees that whisper in some far small town
Whose quiet nursed them, when they thought that gold
Was merely metal, not a grave of mould
In which men bury all that's fine and fair.
When they could chase the jewelled butterfly
Through the green bracken-scented lanes, or sigh
For all the future held so rich and rare ;—
When, though they knew it not, their baby cries
Were lovely as the jewelled butterflies.

PRELUDE.

THE valleys that were known in sunlit hours
Are vast and vague as seas:
Wan as the blackthorn flowers
That quiver in the first spring-scented breeze:
Far as the frosted hollows of the moon.
The sighing woods are still—
Wrapp'd in their age-long boon
Of mystery and sleep. A naked hill,
Loud and discordant, looms against the sky,
And little lights like stars
Break the monotony
Of blue and silver, black and grey. Strange bars
Of light resemble silver masks, and leer
Across the forest lane.
Tall nettles rank from rain
Scent all the woods with some ancestral fear.

Trees rustle by the water. A voice sings
Faintly, to ward off fright.

The water breathes pale rings
Of sad, wan light;
Faintly they grow
Then merge into the night:

The last poor twisted echo
Takes to flight.

PIERROT OLD.

THE harvest moon is at its height,
The evening primrose greets its light
With grace and joy : then opens up
The mimic moon within its cup.
Tall trees as high as Babel tower
Throw down their shadows to the flower—
Shadows that shiver—seem to see
An ending to infinity.

The Pagan Pan has now unbent
And stoops to sniff the night-stock scent
That brings a memory sad and old
When he was young and free and bold
To play his pipe in forests black,
Or follow in some goatherd's track
Who, fill'd with panic fear, then flees
Through all the terror-threatening trees.

Huge silver moths, like ghosts of flowers
Hover about the warm dark bowers
And wait to breathe the lime-tree scent
That perfum'd many a compliment
Address'd to beauties young and gay,

Their faces powdered by the ray
Of that same moon that looks upon
Their dreary lichen-cover'd tomb.
The dryads throw their water wide
And strive to stem the surging tide
That dashes up the fountain base
Hoping to catch the moon's pale face,—
A game now played without a score
For three good centuries or more.
And all the earth smells warm and sweet
—A fitting place for fairy feet.

* * *

But now a figure white and frail
Leaps out into the moonlight pale.
From wakeful thoughts, old age and grief
He finds in this strange world relief.
Yet all the shadow, scent and sound
Poor Pierrot's mind do sad confound.
Watch how he dances to the moon
While singing some faint fragrant tune!

* * *

But Pierrot now is tired and sad
—Remembers all the evenings mad
He spent with that fantastic band
So gaily wand'ring o'er the land.

Pierrot Old.

They all are dead—and at an end.
And he is left without a friend.
For tho' the hours can pass away
Poor Pierrot still must grieve and stay.

* * *

Upon the dewy grass he lies:
The perfumes stir strange memories.
Once more he hears a laughing cry
That brings great tear-drops to his eye.—
That step,—that look,—that voice,—that smile.
Ah! they 've been buried a long while!
And who's the man in pantaloons,
And he who sings such festive tunes?
Why it's that laughing man of sin,
That roguish rascal Harlequin!

* * *

Forgiving Pierrot hides his head
Deep in the grass and mourns the dead;—
Forgetting all the pranks they play'd
And how he was himself betray'd.

* * *

The butterfly lives but one day
But Pierrot still seems doom'd to stay.

* * *

He falls asleep there, tragic-white,—
And wakes to find the bleak daylight.

NIGHT.

ALL the dim terrors dwelling far below
Interr'd by many thousand years of life,
Arise to revel in this evil dark :—
The wail forlorn of dogs that mourn for men—
A shuffling footfall on a creaking board,
The handle of a door that shakes and turns—
A door that opens slightly, not enough :
The rustling sigh of silk along a floor,
The knowledge of being watched by one long dead,
By something that is outside Nature's pale.
The unheard sounds that haunt an ancient house :—
The feel of one who listens in the dark,
Listens to that which happen'd long ago,
Or what will happen after we are dust.—
The awful waiting for a near event,
Or for a crash to rend the silence deep
Enveloping a house that always waits—
A house that whispers to itself and weeps.—
The murmur of the yew, or woodland cries,
A sombre note of music on the breeze ;
A shudder from the ivy that entwines
The horror that is felt within its grip.—
The sound of prowling things that walk abroad,
The nauseous flapping of Night's bat-like wings—
These are the signs the gods have given us
To know the limit of our days and powers.

20th CENTURY HARLEQUINADE.

FATE, malign dotard, weary from his days,
Too old for memory, yet craving pleasure,
Now finds the night too long and bitter cold
—Reminding him of death;—the sun too hot.
The beauty of the universe he hates,
Yet stands regarding earthly carnivals:
—The clatter and the clang of car and train
The hurrying throng of homeward-going men.
The cries of children, colour of the streets,
Their whistling and their shouting and their joy,
The lights, the trees, the fanes and towers of churches,
Thanksgiving for the sun, the moon, the earth,
The labour, love, and laughter of our lives.

* * *

He thinks they mock his age with ribaldry.

* * *

From far within his aeon-battered brain
Well up those wanton wistful images

20th Century Harlequinade.

That first beguil'd the folk of Bergamo.
Now like himself degraded and distress'd
They sink to ignominy; but the clown
Remains, reminder of their former state
And still earns hurricanes of hoarse applause.

* * *

This dotard now decides to end the earth
(Wrecked by its own and his futility).
Recalls the formula of world-broad mirth
—A senseless hitting of those unaware,
Unnecessary breaking of their chattels.

—The pantomime of life is near its close:
The stage is strewn with ends and bits of things,
With mortals maim'd or crucified, and left
To gape at endless horror through eternity.
The face of Fate is wet with other paint
Than that incarnadines the human clown:
Yet still he waves a bladder, red as gold,
And still he gaily hits about with it,
And still the dread revealing lime-light plays
Till the whole sicken'd scene becomes afire.
Antic himself falls on the funeral pyre
Of twisted, tortured, mortifying men.

'THEREFORE IS THE NAME OF IT CALLED BABEL.'

AND still we stood and stared far down
Into that ember-glowing town,
Which every shaft and shock of fate
Had shorn unto its base. Too late
Came carelessly Serenity.

Now torn and broken houses gaze
On to the rat-infested maze
That once sent up rose-silver haze
To mingle through eternity.

The outlines, once so strongly wrought,
Of city walls, are now a thought
Or jest unto the dead who fought . . .
Foundation for futurity.

The shimmering sands where once there played
Children with painted pail and spade
Are drearly desolate,—afraid
To meet Night's dark humanity,

Whose silver cool remakes the dead,
And lays no blame on any head
For all the havoc, fire, and lead,
That fell upon us suddenly,

When all we came to know as good
Gave way to Evil's fiery flood,
And monstrous myths of iron and blood
Seem to obscure God's clarity.

Deep sunk in sin, this tragic star
Sinks deeper still, and wages war
Against itself; strewn all the seas
With victims of a world disease.
—And we are left to drink the lees
Of Babel's direful prophecy.

THE LAMENT OF THE MOLE CATCHER.

AN old, sad man who catches moles
Went lonely down the lane—
All lily-green were the lanes and knolls,
But sorrow numbed his brain.
He paid no heed to flower or weed
As he went his lonely way,
No note he heard from any bird
That sang, that sad spring day.

'I trapp'd the moles for forty years
That could not see the sky,
I reckoned not blind blood or tears,
And the Lord has seen them die.
For forty years I've sought to slay
The small, the dumb, the blind,
But now the Lord has made me pay,
And I am like their kind.
I cannot see or lane or hill,
Or flower or bird or moon;
Lest life shall lay me lower still,
O Lord—come take it soon.'

TEARS.

SILENCE o'erwhelms the melody of Night,
Then slowly drips on to the woods that sigh
For their past vivid vernal ecstasy.
The branches and the leaves let in the light
In patterns, woven 'gainst the paler sky
—Create mysterious Gothic tracery,
Between those high dark pillars,—that affright
Poor weary mortals who are wand'ring by.

* * *

Silence drips on the woods like sad faint rain
Making each frail tired sigh, a sob of pain:
Each drop that falls, a hollow painted tear
Such as are shed by Pierrots, when they fear
Black clouds may crush their silver lord to death.
The world is waxen; and the wind's least breath
Would make a hurricane of sound. The earth
Smells of the hoarded sunlight that gave birth
To the gold-glowing radiance of that leaf
Which falls to bury from our sight its grief.

BLACK MASS.

THE atmosphere is charged with hidden things
—Thoughts that are waiting—wanting to revive
Primeval terrors from their present graves
—Those half-thoughts hidden from the mind of man.—

* * *

The fear of those bright countless stars that shine
Celestially serene on summer nights,
—And those too far for human eye to see—
That make men feel as small and ill at ease
As do the thoughts of immortality.—
The fear of seas that stretch beyond our sight
Unspoilt by any memory of a ship—
Strange silent seas that lap the unknown shores
Of some far-distant, undiscovered land ;—
The curious fear of caves and horrid depths
Where lurk those monsters that we hide away
And bury in our self-complacency.
The dread of all that waits unseen, yet heard :
The fear of moonlight falling on a face :
The sound of sobs at night, the fear of laughter :
The misty terror lurking in a wood
Which night has wrapped in her soft robe of sighs.

Black Mass.

The horror that is felt where man is not,
In lonely lands all dotted with squat trees
That seem to move in the grey twilight breeze
—Or sit and watch you like malicious cripples,
Intent on every movement, every thought.
Where stones like evil fungi raise their bulk
Cover'd with lichen older than the hills—
A warning for the ages yet to come ;
Stones that have seen the sun and moon and stars
Deflect their course for very weariness.
These fears are gather'd, press'd into a room
Vibrating with the wish to damage man,—
To put a seal upon his mind and soul :—
These fears are fused into a living flame.

* * *

The room is filled with men of evil thoughts,
And some poor timid ones, on evil bent.
They stand in anxious, ghastly expectation.

* * *

The guttering light is low and follows them
With subtle shadows tall beyond belief :
Vast elemental shapes that make men feel
Like dusty atoms blown by wayward winds
About the world ;—shadows that sway and swing
And sigh and talk, as if themselves alive.

Black Mass.

Small shadows cringe about the room incredibly
Grostesque and dwarf-like in their attitudes—
Malignant mocking things that caper round—
Triumphant heralds of an evil reign.
Secret and swift they flit about the wall;
Noiseless, they drag their feet about the floor
And murmur subtle infamies of love,
Sweet-sounding threats, and bribes and baleful thoughts.

* * *

Yet all are waiting, evilly alert . . .
Yet all are waiting—watching for events.

* * *

Silence has ceased to be a negative,
Becomes a thing of substance—fills the room
And clings like ivy to the listening walls.
The flickering light flares up—then gutters out.
The shadows seem to shiver and expand
To active evil things that breathe and live.

* * *

But now they whirl and dance in ecstasy.
The highest moment of their mass is near.
We only feel the swaying of the shades,
And evil bars of music, that escape
Our consciousness, tho' we have known it long:—
The music of the evil things of Night

Black Mass.

Scarcely remembered from some dim, vast world—
The things that haunted us when we were young
And nearer to our past realities.
Like scaly snakes, the hymn to evil writhes
Through the sub-conscious basis of our mind.
Eddies of icy breath, or hot as flame,
Twist into all the corners of the room,
Filling our veins with fire like red-hot iron,
And wicked as the Prince of Evil Things.

* * *

Faintly his glowing presence is revealed to us
Amid the chorus of his satellites.
The consummation of our awful hopes.

THE CARNIVALS OF PEACE.

HAD I a clearer brain, imagination,
A flowing pen and better ending rhymes,
A firmer heart devoid of hesitation,
Unbiassed happiness these barren times
With pleasure in this discontented life,
Forgetfulness of sorrow and of pain,
Triumphant victory on fear and strife,
Daring to look behind and look again
A-head for all the slowly coming days,
See nothing but the Carnivals of Peace,
Forget the dreams of death and other ways
Men have imagined for their own decrease. . . .
I'd write a song to conquer all our tears,
Lasting for ever through the folding years.

DESTRUCTION.

I SAW the people climbing up the street
Maddened with war and strength and thought to kill.
And after followed Death, who held with skill
His torn rags, royally, and stamped his feet.

The fires flamed up and burnt the serried town
Most where the poorer, humbler, houses were;
Death followed with proud feet and smiling stare,
And the mad crowds ran madly up and down.

And many died and hid in unfound places
In the black ruins of the frenzied night.
Yet Death still followed in his surplice, white
And streaked, in imitation of their faces. . . .

But in the morning, men began again
To mock Death—laughing at their bitter pain.

SONNET.

THIS is no time for prayers or words or song.
With folded hands we sit and slowly stare.
The world's old wheels go round, and like a fair
The clowns and peep-shows ever pass along.
Our brains are dumb with cold, and worn with strife,
And every day has lingered on our faces
Marking its usual course and weary paces
With cruel cunning care and sober knife.
Fate, like a sculptor working with great tools,
Now moulds his genius into clever ways.
Our souls are cut and torn all for his praise
When his great masterpiece is praised by fools;
Yet winter comes like death, and takes the pride
From his strong hands that held us till we died.

REMORSE.

I HAVE been wasteful, wanton, foolish, bold,
And loved with grasping hands and lustful eyes
All through the hectic days and summer skies,
And through the endless streets; but now am old
And ill and bad—content with discontent, —
Enduring the discomfort and the blows
With sunken head and heart that shaking goes.
Resigned to sit and wait in punishment,
A martyr without claim, a parody
Of classic crowned apostles and sweet saints
Now praised in marble and in gorgeous paints
Or singing in loud scores of harmony . . . .
I sit ashamed and silent in this room
While the wet streets go gathering in their gloom.

UNEASINESS.

TO-NIGHT I hear a thousand evil things
Between the panels and the mouldering floor;—
Small bitter things with hearts and, maybe, wings,
That curse their bondage yet entreat for more
Free wicked time and space to hurt our lives,
And bring unthought of ill-luck to us all;
Undreamèd horrors, stories of old-wives,
Armies of corpses hid behind the wall
That creep and grind and tear each other's souls
And fight with devils in a horrid tongue,
Making sleep flee away beyond the Poles . . . .
All this I know, although the night is young
And ling'ring breathless, full of timid fear,
Waiting in terror for *their* hour that's near.

FROM THE TRAIN.

SMOKE-STACKS, coal-stacks, hay-stacks, slack,
Colourless, scentless, pointless, dull;
Railways, highways, roadways, black,
Grantham, Birmingham, Leeds and Hull.

Steamers, passengers, convoys, trains,
Merchandise travelling over the sea;
Smut-filled streets and factory lanes,
What can these ever mean to me?

PROCESSIONS.

WITHIN the long black avenues of Night
Go pageants of delight

With masks of glass the night has stained with wine,
Hair lifted like a vine ;—

And all the coloured curtains of the air
Were fluttered. Passing there,

The sounds seemed warring suns ; and music flowed
As blood ; the mask'd lamps showed

Tall houses, light had gilded like despair :
Black windows, gaping there.

Through all the rainbow spaces of our laughter
Those pageants followed after :

The negress Night, within her house of glass
Watched the processions pass.

GAIETY.

BLOW out the candles. Let the dance begin.
Already, pale as Sin

The candles weep and pry like living things. . . .
They dance, who have no wings.

More vast and black than endless sleep, this room.
Time beats his empty drum

Whose hollow sound is echoed in our eyes—
Deep wells where no moon lies.

A crumpled paper mask hides every face—
Creased to a smile of grace,

Their eyelids gilded, so the bitter tears
Make music for men's ears.

These masks, some coloured like an August moon
Or white, as sands that swoon

Within Time's hour-glass, some as grey as rain,—
Still mimic joy and pain.

Thin pointed rags and tags edge our attire. . . .
Bright plumes? . . . . or tongues of fire

Gaiety.

Whose painted laughter cracks the gilded sky
Of this flat empery

That has no soil where any flower may root,
No rest for weary foot,

But endless leagues of mirror: such the ground
That no horizons bound,—

Carved topaz water;—sound a mirror seems!
O! nakedness of dreams

Beneath the blinding radiance of hot skies
Where no sun lives or dies.

* * *

Now that the dusty, creaking curtain, Day
Is folded, laid away,

Each maskèd dancer is both piercèd Heart
And Dream, its poniard.

Small winds creep from Infinity. . . . A flame
Our blown hair, white as shame.

That seed of worlds, the stars, are nought but blown
Red tinsel from a Clown;

The candles, living things to dance and pry.
Out! hard Reality!

THAIS IN HEAVEN.

WHEN you lay dying fast, you said :
And, weeping, were not comforted—

'Look through this paper world! I see
The lights of Heaven burn like gold
The other side ; and Souls are sold
For these, yet only flesh, sold we!'

And then you died and went to bliss.—
I'm curious now to know if love
Is really heaven—where *you* rove.—
Your kind of love . . . or mine, Thaïs?

And is there still the clinging mud?
I think it drowned your soul like wine.
And do the stars like street-lamps shine
Gilding the gutters where you stood,

And lighting up your small face where
Thin powder like a trail of dust,
Shows the mortality of lust. . . .
Still black as hissing rain, your hair?

Your body had become your soul. . . .
Thaïs,—do spirits crumble whole?

A LAMENTATION.

I.

OUR heart-strings were the music of the suns
When their strong youth comes freshened from deep seas;
We were the perfum'd portals of the dawn—
The singing gardens of the Pleiades.
The vineyards of the world, our heavy locks,
When all the fruits of summer shout for joy;
Our eyelids were the chambers of the south—
The gold light dripp'd therefrom like frankincense.
Then madness blew on us, a mighty wind:
The palaces of light are overthrown
And broken lie the rainbows their great harps,
With burning music muted by the dust.
Our thoughts, strong horses that unfettered ran
Within the golden pastures of the Day:
Then madness reined them; she has drunk their strength
As summer drains the strongest rivers' pride.
We built new worlds with our immortal kiss,
Then madness swept like Time across our worlds.
And when we spoke, all space broke into flower,
Till madness came like winter withering.

A Lamentation.

And Time was but the beat of heart to heart,
Till madness stopp'd the heart-beat of the world.
Bull-throated now the fires of madness blast.
All space becomes one golden wheel of flame—
The agony of endless moons and suns ;
That giant red hole that was the ancient sea
Is fill'd with wreckage of the ruined sky,—
The world's vast walls reel blindly,—then collapse.

II.

Pull down the heavens like a sackcloth pall
To spread upon our faces sealed with night.
Pull down the sun and burn the fiery moon ;
The fabric of the air is torn apart :
The world is dead. There is no world at all.
The light is dead. There shall be no more light.
Pull down the heavens like a sackcloth pall—
Crush down the beat of Time. It was my heart.

(From 'Saul.')

ANTIC HAY.

HOW like a lusty satyr, the hot sun
Doth in his orbit run
O'er rivers and the light blue hills of noon,
And where the white still moon
Sleeps in the lovely woodlands of the light.
Made drunken with his might,
Like flames the goat-foot satyrs leap and fling
The blossom'd beams of spring.
The oreads leave their swan-like fountains, bells
Of foam, and dark wood-wells,
And grasses where the pale dew lovelorn lies
And like an echo dies.
The river-gods are tossing their blue manes
Still wet with brine; the reins
Lie loosely on their plunging horses; earth
Shakes with the storm of mirth;
And all the cloudy castles of the air
Are bathed with radiance. There
Beneath dark chestnut trees, King Pan doth sport
With all his hornèd court.

Antic Hay.

Their goat-feet clattering to the oaten tune
That cools the heat of noon
Like water gurgling; hoofs all wreath'd with flowers
Wild as the dew-pale hours,
The clownish satyrs dance the antic hay;
They butt with horns and sway
While laughing leaves like smitten cymbals thrill
Their sunburnt dance; until
The light falls like a rain of panick'd leaves
Through the gold heart of eves.
O'er misty fields, mild Dian's old faint horn
Bloweth a sound forlorn.
Then from their hives with palest flowers bedight
The yellow bees take flight—
Whirling where old Silenus tries to sing
Unto his hornèd King
—Feeding upon gold-freckled strawberries—
And sting the poor fat fool until he cries.

THE DRUNKARD.

THIS black tower drinks the blinding light.
Strange windows livid-white,

Tremble beneath the curse of God.
Yet living weeds still nod

To the huge sun, a devil's eye
That tracks the souls that die.

The clock beats like the heart of Doom
Within the narrow room;

And whispering with some ghastly air
The curtains float and stir.

But still she never speaks a word;
I think she hardly heard

When I with reeling footsteps came
And softly spoke her name.

But yet she does not sleep. Her eyes
Still watch in wide surprise

The thirsty knife that pitied her;
But those lids never stir,

Though creeping Fear still gnaws like pain
The hollow of her brain.

She must have some sly plan, the cheat,
To lie so still. The beat

That once throbbed like a muffled drum
With fear to hear me come,

Now never sounds when I creep nigh.
O! she was always sly.

And if to spite her, I dared steal
Behind her bed, and feel

With fumbling fingers for her heart . . .
Ere I could touch the smart

Once more wild shriek on shriek would tear
The dumb and shuddering air . . .

And still she never speaks to me.
She only smiles to see

How in dark corners secret-sly
New-born Eternity,

All spider-like, doth spin and cast
Strange threads to hold Time fast.

THE MOTHER.

I.

OUR dreams create the babes we bear;
Our beauty goes to make them fair.
We give them all we have of good,
Our blood to drink, our hearts for food;

And in our souls they lie and rest
Until upon their mother's breast
So innocent and sweet they lie.
They live to curse us; then they die.

When he was born, it seemed the spring
Had come again with birds to sing
And blossoms dancing in the sun
Where streams released from winter run.

His sunlit hair was all my gold;
His loving eyes my wealth untold.
All heaven was hid within the breast
Whereon my child was laid to rest.

He grew to manhood. Then one came
False-hearted as Hell's blackest shame,
To steal my child from me, and thrust
The soul I loved down to the dust.

Her hungry, wicked lips were red
As that dark blood my son's hand shed ;
Her eyes were black as Hell's own night,
Her ice-cold breast was winter-white.—

I had put by a little gold
To bury me when I was cold.
Her fangèd, wanton kiss to buy
My son's love willed that I should die.

The gold was hid beneath my bed ;
So little, and my weary head
Was all the guard it had. They lie
So quiet and still who soon must die.

He stole to kill me while I slept—
The little son, who never wept
But that I kissed his tears away
So fast, his weeping seemed but play.

So light his footfall. Yet I heard
Its echo in my heart, and stirred
From out my weary sleep to see
My child's face bending over me.

The wicked knife flashed serpent-wise.—
Yet I saw nothing but his eyes,
And heard one little word he said
Go echoing down among the Dead.

II.

They say the Dead may never dream.
But yet I heard my pierced heart scream
His name within the dark. They lie
Who say the Dead can ever die.

For in the grave I may not sleep
For dreaming that I hear him weep.
And in the dark, my dead hands grope
In search of him. O barren hope!

I cannot draw his head to rest
Deep down upon my wounded breast . . .
He gave the breast that fed him well
To suckle the small worms of Hell.

The Mother.

The little wicked thoughts that fed
Upon the weary, helpless Dead . . .
They whispered o'er my broken heart,
They stuck their fangs deep in the smart.

'The child she bore with bloody sweat
And agony has paid his debt.
Through that bleak face the stark winds play;
The crows have chased his soul away.

'His body is a blackened rag
Upon the tree—a monstrous flag.'
Thus one Worm to the other saith.
Those slow mean servitors of Death.

They chuckling said: 'Your soul grown blind
With anguish, is the shrieking Wind
That blows the flame that never dies
About his empty, lidless eyes.'

I tore them from my heart. I said:
'The life-blood that my son's hand shed,
That from my broken heart outburst
I'd give again, to quench his thirst.

He did no sin. But cold blind earth
The body was that gave him birth.
All mine, all mine the sin; the love
I bore him was not deep enough.'

EDITH SITWELL.

THE King of China's daughter
She never would love me,
Though I hung my cap and bells upon
Her nutmeg tree.
For oranges and lemons
The stars in bright blue air
(I stole them long ago, my dear)
Were dangling there.
The moon, she gave me silver pence;
The sun did give me gold:
And both together softly blew
And made my porridge cold.
But the King of China's daughter
Pretended not to see,
When I hung my cap and bells upon
Her nutmeg tree.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR THE KING.

THE satyrs howl beside the paven pools,
Their cloven hoofs scorch yellow marks like moons
Upon the vivid green. Their mad hilarity
Makes desolation yet more desolate.
And all the yearning of the summer trees
Falls on to them, consumes their veins with fire.
They leap about, and crown with drunken flowers
The hornèd heads, now deeply slumbering.
Time flies away and shakes the passing world,
O'erthrows the temples of the morning air:
Great crimson comets fall like bursting grapes—
The deserts cry unto the moon for rain
To cool the fever of their silver sand;
And fainting winds bear far and wide the moan
Of beasts that perish, neath the ashen sky.
The satyrs dance to these strange harmonies
And swim and splash among the water-pools.

* * *

But Death, a waveless sea, rolls ever on;
Its waters lap the silent palace walls,
Whose windows now are lit with lunacy,
Throwing out gleams to falsify the world.

* * *

The King raised up his mighty limbs from sleep;
His stature great as any cedar-tree,
His limbs like branches stretching far and wide,
His face as rugged as the centuries
That still retain the memory of him mad.
His speech is dull and thick, comes from afar
As if his soul had fled to other shores.—
'Before my majesty the sun is burnt,
Sheds its mute ashes to a mourning world.
Nineveh is great and Babylon my Kingdom.
I rule the world. I am a mighty God.'

Death listens at strange gates. The corridors
Are long as time, and straight, but full of fear.—
The Palace whispers to itself and waits.

* * *

The King went forth into the outer black,
Resembling the mockery of his mind,
He fled up to the hills away from thought.
The velvet of his purple robe was caught
By thorns, and stinging branches goad him on.
His royal hands are brown with blood and dirt;

Nebuchadnezzar the King.

His gilded sandals and high crown of gold
Are dull and dusty. Far below, there lies
Great Babylon, whose domes repeat the shape
Of that same heaven that would crush them down.
Great towers, like lamentations, edge the sky
Tattered and torn by all those subtle shapes.—
But death, the waveless sea, has turnèd back,
Walks with the King, and inundates the hills.—

* * *

'Great is Nineveh and Babylon my Kingdom,
I rule the world. I am a mighty God.
Why do the satyrs quit their water pools?
Is it my majesty that frightens them?
Yet am I desolate, alone with Pan
To face the horrors of unholy nights.
Why do the satyrs quit their water-pools,
And nimbly run along the mountain slopes,
Down to the sea that rises up to meet them
And opens out to show them its contents?
There at the ocean bottom lies the Sun,
The cause and reason of my discontent;
The Sun—that always envied me in vain
And tried to burn the world that worshipp'd me.
The satyrs know how great a King am I:
They go to drown the Sun in fathoms deep,
Or burn it with its own black impious hate.
The foremost has it! See them tear it up!'

Nebuchadnezzar the King.

* * *

'The Sun is burnt before my majesty—
Sheds its mute ashes to a mourning world.
Nineveh is great and Babylon my Kingdom.
I rule the world. I am a mighty God.
A diadem of stars upon my head,
My body cloth'd in the black robe of Night,
Eternally I walk the scented hills,
Treading on flowers that deck Apollo's crown,
And meet my brother Pan who walks with me.—
Just now I heard him speaking in my ear:
'Great is the King—none greater 'neath the stars!
Great is the King—the King of Babylon!
Great is the King—the Babylonian King!
Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon!'

I.

THERE was a peace at eve no other hour
Knows of: the east, a dusken tapestry of yellow light
Woven with feathers from the wings of birds in flight,
Curtained the presence of an unseen Power.

I stood between deep ranks of pillaring pine
In a small glade, and up above a cupola more deep
Recessed into the blueness of the sky. All wrapped in sleep
Save the unresting vigil of starshine.

And then I called on God. The pinetops kissed,
The sky was suddenly disturbed, vague eddies in the air
Scattered night-perfumes, cloud-sheets raced, grass rustled
everywhere,
Nature made preparation for that mighty tryst.

II.

CLUTCHING thine hand, sweet Death, my tranquil friend,
And nestling close to thee, I shall have power
To rest uninjured by the transient hour,
Knowing my end.
I shall be held above the eddying tide
Into a sunlit quiet, and thence hide
With but an outstretched palm the wearying crowd,
'Twixt whom and God a gulf unknownly wide
Is fixed, to drown their littlenesses loud.
Blow forth, Death's herald, from thy silver horn
Strains sweeter far than birds a-song at morn.

III.

i.

ALL day he moved not, lying low amid
The cool fresh odorous grass. He heard the trill
Of water leaping somewhere shadow-hid,
And in unfettered rapture drank his fill
Of deep rose odour, till sleep stole unbid
Upon him, with the music of the rill.

ii.

He woke in darkness. 'Twixt him and the skies
Darted the black things of the middle night—
While all around broke shrill and tragic cries
As of hope dead, and fancy put to flight.
And somewhere, hidden from his burning eyes,
Cold dropping water set his heart afright.

I.

THERE are songs enough of love, of joy, of grief;
Roads to the sunset, alleys to the moon;
Poems of the red rose and the golden leaf,
Fantastic faery and gay ballad tune.

The long road unto nothing I will sing,
Sing on one note, monotonous and dry,
Of sameness, calmness, and the years that bring
No more emotion than the fear to die.

Grey house, grey house, and after that grey house,
Another house as grey and steep and still:
An old cat tired of playing with a mouse,
A sick child tired of chasing down the hill.

Shuffle and hurry, idle feet and slow,
Grim face and merry face, so ugly all!
Why do you hurry? Where is there to go?
Why are you shouting? Who is there to call?

Lovers still kissing, feverish to drain
The last juice from the shrivelled fruit of lust:
A black umbrella held up in the rain,
The raindrops making patterns in the dust.

If this distaste I hold for fools is such,
Shall I not spit upon myself as well?
Do I not eat and drink and smile as much?
Do I not fatten also in this hell?

Sadness and joy—if they were melted up,
Things that were great—upon the fires of time
Drop but as soup in the accustomed cup,
Settle in stagnance, trickle into grime.

Wars, passions, art that fire a man or two
And set him like a pilgrim on his way
With Beauty's face before him—what of you,
Priest, Butcher, Scholar, Dullard, in that day?

The dullard masses that no god can save!
If I were God, to rise and strike you down
And break your churches in an angry wave
And make a furious bonfire of your town!

God in a coloured globe, alone and still,
Embroidering wonders with a fearless brain,
On looms of spaces measureless, to fill
The empty air with passion and with pain,

Emblazon all the heavens with desire
And Wisdom delved for in the depth of time—
Thoughts sculptured mountainous, and fancy's fire
Caught in the running swiftness of a rhyme.

Passion high-pedestalled, pangs turned to treasure,
Perfected and undone and built afresh
With concentrated agony and Pleasure . . .
If I were God, and not an ounce of flesh!

II.

NOW is the evening dipped knee-deep in blood
And the dun hills stand fearful in their places.
Cunning in sin, we shuffle down the streets
With burdens of vainglory on our backs,
Spinning with spider-hands the miser's web
Or sitting placid, gay and fat with ease.
But out beyond, the armies of the world
March doomwards to the rhythm of the drum
Under the thirsting sun. Death holds his state:
His skeleton hands are filled with scarlet spoil:
He stands on flaming ramparts, waving high
The ensign of decay. All his bones are dressed
With livid roses; all his pillars black
Are girt in ashen poppies, and on dust
He raises up his awful golden throne.

Oh! your fierce shrieks have fainted on deaf ears;
Your tears have flowed on feet of carven stone;
Your blood is spilt for the boiling-pot of God
Where good and evil mix; and all your rage
Is but a thin smoke wafted in His face.

III.

MOUTH of the dust I kiss, corruption absolute,
Worm, that shall come at last to be my paramour,
Envenomed, unseen wanderer who alone is mute,
Yet greater than gods or heroes that have gone before.

For you I sheave the harvest of my hair,
For you the whiteness of my flesh, my passion's valour,
For you I throw upon the grey screen of the air
My prism-like conceptions, my gigantic colour.

For you the delicate hands that fashion to make great
Clay, and white paper, plant a tongue in silence;
For you the battle-frenzy, and the might of hate,
Science for giving wounds, and healing science.

For you the heart's wild love, beauty, long care,
Virginity, passionate womanhood, perfected wholeness;
For you the unborn child that I prepare,—
You, flabby, boneless, brainless, senseless, soulless.

IV.

FOR my delight, wind in the chestnut trees
Moving incessant 'gainst a silvern sky;
Clouds ravelled and untorn, swept like the seas'
Insane confusion, and their ceaseless sigh.
Glamour of coloured flowers, the sensuous bees
Moaning, gold-coated, and the butterfly
Tossed into arabesques upon the breeze.
The purple eyelid of the bright sun's eye
As he lies sleeping in his luxuries . . .
With jewels and with bells and subtle dye
Beauty has strung them, has embroidered these
A cloak of payment for my flatteries.

V.

THE door has clanged behind me, I have left
The pleasure-house where I have lingered long.
The street is chill in early morning, strange,
Pale-lipped, anæmic. Where to take my way ?
North and south it goes, I have no aim,
No great equipment for my journeying ;
But like an outcast on a desert strand
I stand and face the long horizon's line.
So feels the young moon slung into the sky,
Upon the fainting shoulders of the day ;
So feels the swan of evening all alone
Drifting across the waters of the sky.

ZEPPELINS.

I.

THE startling thunder bursting from a gun :
How swift runs Fear, quicksilver that is freed !
Now every muscle weakens, every pulse
Is set at gallop-pace, and every nerve
Stretched taut with terror and a mad revolt.
The fear of death, the longing still to live,—
Live in a vain world racked with hundred pains,
Limp in a dull street housed with crumbling dreams ;
Only to breathe and eat and sleep and love
A little longer ; oh ! a little year !
Prayers deep-entombed rise up in resurrection ;
The silence and the void are closing round :
Worms creep in dreadful hunger from the ground
To drag our bodies' wonder from the light.
Though all the world shall fall into their cells
And lie within their larders, shelf on shelf,
Yet will I 'scape them, on the topmost hill :
Yet must I stay to spite them,—only I !

II.

LEAVING the dun river with hurried tapping feet
And up the long uncomfortable street
With eyes uninterested yet forced to see and read
The dingy notices once sharp and bright with greed,
Now drear with want, that swear the Queen's Hotel
And Brown's Hotel and King's are doing well.—
A soldier and a beggar mock me as I go,
The light steals after me, emerging slow
And pale from the dim alleys shadow-crouched.
I hurried by the drunkard as he slouched
From lamp-post unto lamp-post. . . . Then I saw
Caught in the mirror of a tailor's door
My own reflection as I hurried past,
My flaring colours and my face aghast—
The scarlet tassel of my hat that hung
Limp as a spent flame, and my skirt that clung
About my knees and fluttered at the back:
An injured moth, with sulphur stripes and black,
My bag flamboyant as a pillar-box;
My frayed gilt fringe of hair and tarnished locks.
Jagged and crude and swift I seemed to pass
Painted too brightly on that temperate glass.
. . . An omnibus from sudden corner reels:
Silence lies mangled underneath the wheels.

E. WYNDHAM TENNANT.

HOME THOUGHTS IN LAVENTIE.

GREEN gardens in Laventie!
Soldiers only know the street
Where the mud is churned and splashed about
By battle-wending feet;
And yet beside one stricken house there is a glimpse of grass,
Look for it when you pass.

Beyond the Church whose pitted spire
Seems balanced on a strand
Of swaying stone and tottering brick
Two roofless ruins stand,
And here among the wreckage where the back wall should have [been
We found a garden green.

The grass was never trodden on,
The little path of gravel
Was overgrown with celandine,
No other folk did travel
Along its weedy surface, but the nimble-footed mouse
Running from house to house.

So all among the vivid blades
Of soft and tender grass
We lay, nor heard the limber wheels
That pass and ever pass,
In noisy continuity until their stony rattle
Seems in itself a battle.

Home Thoughts in Laventie.

At length we rose up from this ease
Of tranquil happy mind,
And searched the garden's little length
Some new pleasaunce to find;
And there, some yellow daffodils and jasmine hanging high
Did rest the tired eye.

The fairest and most fragrant
Of the many sweets we found,
Was a little bush of Daphne flower
Upon a mossy mound,
And so thick were the blossoms set and so divine the scent
That we were well content.

Hungry for Spring I bent my head,
The perfume fanned my face,
And all my soul was dancing
In that little lovely place,
Dancing with a measured step from wrecked and shattered towns
Away . . . upon the Downs.

I saw green banks of daffodil,
Slim poplars in the breeze,
Great tan-brown hares in gusty March
A-courting on the leas;
And meadows with their glittering streams, and silver scurrying dace,
Home . . . what a perfect place.

SONG.

HOW shall I tell you of the freedom of the Downs?
You who love the dusty life and durance of great towns,
And think the only flowers that please embroider ladies' gowns,
How shall I tell you?

How shall I tell you of the Avon's sweeping flow,
With his pollards like old henchmen in a sage and solemn row,
And the silvery water-cuts that shine when thymy breezes blow?
How shall I tell you?

How shall I tell you of the roads that stretch away
Like streamers from a dancing pole in the tripsome month of May,
For what care you for ought beside your porto and tokay,
How shall I tell you?

How shall I tell you how sweet it is to lie
Upon the cool and springy turf and gaze into the sky?
But it would only crease your vest and set your hair awry—
I shall not tell you.

E. WYNDHAM TENNANT.

RE-INCARNATION.

I TOO remember distant golden days
When even my soul was young; I see the sand
Whirl in a blinding pillar towards the band
Of orange sky-line 'neath a turquoise blaze—
(Some burnt-out sky spread o'er a glistening land)
—And slim brown jargoning men in blue and gold,
I know it all so well, I understand
The ecstacy of worship ages-old.

Hear the first truth: The great far-seeing soul
Is ever in the humblest husk; I see
How each succeeding section takes its toll
In fading cycles of old memory.
And each new life the next life shall control
Until perfection reach Eternity.

'LI-TAI-PÉ DRINKS AND DROWNS.'

THE spray splashes on the petals of the anemone
Creasing the water to a mesh of magic circles moving outwards:
The petals shake like the notes
Of a woman singing.
Then Li-Tai-Pé lifts back his cup
And the red scimitar goes back to its sheath.
The magical rings move further away
Till they shake the ivory towers of the water-lilies.
Now, as a finger shuts the notes of a flute,
The petals fold together.
Then Li-Tai-Pé with reeling mind
Sees the moon as an ivory mask
Hung from the belt of Fate the Histrion.
With such a mask, the princesses will deem him of the dragon-blood.
He jumps to catch it.
The moon-stained water runs into his mouth.
With open arms he sinks
And through the jade-cold water seeks his diadem.

A PICTURE.

SHE sat within the dappling shade
That flickered o'er the forest glade,
The listening birches shadows made.

In that still place there was no stir,
About her fell the hair of her
Heavy with aloes and with myrrh.

A golden chain her waist confined,
Closed were her eyes, as she were blind.
Her robe was all with crimson lined,

With twisted cords about the hem,
Her wrists were twined with many a gem,
Her neck was like a lily stem.

About her feet a dragon slept,
His head upon her lap she kept
And while she guarded it, she wept.

A Picture.

Blind, anguished tears went dropping down
Upon the dragon's glassy crown,
Upon the margent of her gown.

Tall columbines grew 'mid the grass,
Between them shadow-mice did pass,
With soundless feet, pass and repass.

And, over all, the silence lay;
It seemed the evening of the day:
It seemed the hour when all men pray.

So sate she still, this prison'd maid,
Within the lonely forest glade
Sate tending well the dragon's head.

Was she alive, and is she dead?

A DIRGE.

THOU art no longer here,
No longer shall we see thy face,
But, in that other place,
Where may be heard
The roar of the world rushing down the wantways of the stars;
And the silver bars
Of heaven's gate
Shine soft, and clear:
Thou mayest wait.

No longer shall we see
Thee walking in the crowded streets,
But where the ocean of the Future beats
Against the flood-gates of the Present, swirling to this earth,
Another birth
Thou mayest have;
Another Arcady
May thee receive.
Not here thou dost remain,
Thou art gone far away,

A Dirge.

Where, at the portals of the day,
The hours ever dance in ring, a silvern-footed throng,

While Time looks on,
And seraphs stand
Choiring an endless strain
On either hand.

Thou canst return no more;
Not as the happy time of spring
Comes after winter burgeoning
On wood and wold in folds of living green, for thou art dead.
Our tears we shed
In vain, for thou
Dost pace another shore,
Untroubled now.

THE LADY OF SHALLOTT.

She singeth as she lieth in the barge.

She sang:—

'AH now at length I see
The havens of Eternity.
The golden houses, one and all
Peer o'er the high embattled wall,
Where maidens with calm, holy eyes
Bear lily flowers of Paradise
For ever: knowing naught of death,
And little of this world beneath
They have forgotten what they knew
Before their souls were born anew;
Soon shall I even be as they.
Before the ending of the day
Sure it shall be my part to stand
With lily flowers in mine hand,
In a white robe,—and my gold head
With roses shall be garlanded;—
With deathless roses.—
See the skies
Unfold the angelic ecstasies.
See! the High Throne—the blessed Saints.

Ah God! my God! my spirit faints
Seeing these things.—
A crown of bliss
Thou givest to me, giving this,
That I may see the courts of Heaven
Open before me.—

Sure, forgiven
Now all my sins must be; for I
Dear Lord, sinned never wittingly,
—Save this I did—on Lancelot's face
I looked with love. Grant me thy grace!
Grant me thy grace.

Soon comes the night
—Short night but drear—then the light
Cloud-builded wells of Paradise
Beholden by the angels' eyes.
Dear Lord of Life, I am forgiven;
My spirit scales the walls of Heaven
And falls before God's feet: at length
I can behold Him in His strength
And glorious might and majesty.
Oh Thou that art Eternity,
Once, ere I die, and be forgot,
I pray to Thee for Lancelot

That he may know me in the wall
A lilied maiden like them all.
And grant, O Lord that through the shade
Of Death, I may pass unafraid.

For those dear for whom I should pray,
Lord, care Thou for them every day,
And guard from danger every night.'

Her voice rose higher:

'Ah! the fight
Is over now: the brazen gates
Stand wide: for me the porter waits.
O Havens of Eternity,
Ye open wide your doors to me.
I, wandering, sinning and forlorn,
Weary and sad.
—Up through the torn
Mantle of cloud my soul ascends.
Once,—once again before life ends,
Commend to God on high my kin
On Earth, before I enter in,
Safe in the Sanctuaried wall,
A lilied maid among them all.'

ENVIOUS YOUTH.

1916.

I AM not old enough to claim the privilege of years,
To sit apart and say to youth—
'Now watch my nodding wisdom;
Pay reverence to that you cannot see
Has any claim to reverence but age.'
I am not old enough to say to youth,
'I too once felt like you. But now the years
Sit heavy on my shoulders—therefore you are wrong.'
I cannot fold my hands, and having lived my life
Count with uneasy eyes the heavy, passing hours,
Nursing each minute with unceasing care,
Lest an unwary movement snatch a few from me.
For I am young, and in my glad young veins
The blood runs freely.
I seize each passing hour
And fling it gaily where its fellows lie,
And care not what old age doth call that heap—
The Past—the Present—or To Be.
Why should I care? All time is mine,
Or should be.
But wise age has held the world,
And turned it round and round,
Until the sudden death that age avoids with anxious care
Lurks in its every corner, and claims
Not age, but me.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE.

To the memory of E. W. T.

ONE said,—'Death is a great adventure.'
It may be so. Yet being very young
I had not pictured Death as my great quest.
On the long road which lay before me
I did not see this unsuspected turning
Which I am forced to take.
I had imagined many glowing quests,
But at the end of each Life waited,
Crowned me, sent me on,
Life the beautiful, Life the renewer.
I would not have them think I fear,
Or that I grudge this thing they ask of me;
I stood upon the threshold of the world,
I saw the radiance round time un-born,
Felt the faint stirrings of the life in it,
Knew, though I could not understand,
That all I saw and felt belonged to me.
And I was glad.

* * * *

Then in my hands that trustingly advanced
To take the gifts that Time new-born might offer,
I found a sword.
In my young mind which hardly yet saw clear
To order rules of life,
They wrote the rules of death.
In my young heart which had not yet lived long enough
To know its mate,
They placed an enemy, full-grown;
And where I looked for Life
Death stands—The Great Adventure.

THREE PROSE POEMS.

From the French of Jean Arthur Rimbaud.

I.—FAIRY.

AT the birth of Helen were present the saps of beauty which flow in the untrodden shadows and in the still radiancy of the astral silence. The burning heat of summer was confided to songless birds, the indolence of summer to a barque made of griefs beyond price, moving through bays of dead loves and faded perfumes.

This was after the time of woodcutters singing to the sound of the torrent in the ruined forest; the tinkling of sheep-bells in the echoing valleys; the cries of the steppes.

For the childhood of Helen the thickets and the deep shadows trembled, the heart of the poor and the legends of heaven were stirred.

Her eyes are more lovely than all shining things; cool airs that pass, move not so lightly as Helen dancing; more precious is she than the joy of perfect beauty, than the joy of the perfect hour.

II.—CHILDHOOD.

i.

THIS black-eyed, yellow-maned idol has neither family nor courtiers. More noble is she than a Mexican legend or a Flemish fable. The staring azure and greenery which is her kingdom runs along level shores, those shores which the shipless waves have called by names so ferociously Greek, Slav and Celtic. On the forest verge—where dream-flowers tinkle, glitter and shine—sits the young girl with the orange lips. Her knees are crossed in the crystal flood which wells up in the meadows, her nakedness clothed by the passing shadows of the rainbows, by the shadows of the flowers and sea. Ladies promenade on the terraces near the sea; there are infantas and giantesses. Stately negresses sit in the verdigris moss, jewels upright on the slippery ground of the shrubberies and the thawing gardens. There too, are young mothers and grown-up sisters in whose eyes are countless pilgrimages; sultanas, princesses of haughty bearing and tyrannical costumes, little foreigners and persons gently unhappy.

How irksome is the hour of 'darling child' and 'darling heart.'

Three Prose Poems. II.

ii.

IT is she, the little dead child, behind the rose bushes.—The young mother who is dead, comes down the flight of steps. The cousin's open carriage creaks over the sand.—And there is the little brother—(he is in India!) there, in front of the setting sun, against the field of gilly-flowers;—and those old people who have been buried, now stand erect in the wall-flower rampart.

A swarm of golden leaves surrounds the general's house They are in the south.—You must follow the red road to reach the empty inn. The castle is for sale, and the shutters have dropped off.—The key of the church must have been taken away by the priest.—Round the park, the park-keepers' lodges are empty. So high are the palisades that one can see nothing but the rustling tree tops. After all, there is nothing to see inside.

The fields slope up to the villages, left empty of cocks and anvils. The sluices are open. Oh! The Calvaries and the wind-mills in the desert, the islands and the hay-ricks.

Magic flowers hummed all around. The gentle slopes lulled them to rest. Beasts of a fabulous elegance walked about. Far beyond, over the sea—that eternity of hot tears—clouds massed themselves.

iii.

IN the wood there is a bird; his song checks you and makes you blush.

There is a clock which does not strike the hour.

There is a bog in which is a nest of white beasts.

There is a cathedral which comes down, and a lake which goes up.

There is a little carriage standing forsaken in the underwood; or it comes down the path at a run, decked with ribbons.

There is a troupe of little actors in costume; one just sees them on the road which skirts the wood.

And last of all, if you are hungry or thirsty there is someone who chases you.

* *

Three Prose Poems. II.

iv.

FINALLY, sing the praises of this white-washed tomb, with its bands of cement in relief,—deep under the earth.

I sit with my elbows on the table, the lamp throws a bright light on these journals and uninteresting books. What an idiot I am to re-read them!

Far, far above my subterranean drawing-room the houses are taking root, the fogs are gathering. The mud is red or black. Monstrous town, unending night!

Not so high up are the sewers. Round about me, nothing but the density of the globe. Perhaps gulfs of azure, wells of fire? Perhaps it is on these planes that moons and comets, seas and fables, meet each other. In my hours of bitterness I imagine balls of sapphire, of metal. I am master of the silence. Why is there a patch of palest light in the corner of the vaulted roof, as though from an air-shaft?

III.—DAWN.

I HAVE held in my arms the summer dawn.

Nothing stirred yet in front of the palaces. The waters were still. The shadows had not yet left their encampments in the woods. I walked, awaking the brisk warm winds; and precious stones gazed at me, and wings rose around me noiselessly.

My first adventure was in a footpath already covered with splinters of fresh pale light, where a flower told me her name.

I laughed at the water-fall which twisted its ragged way through the pines: at the silver summit I espied the goddess.

Then one by one I lifted her veils,—in the glade by a movement of my arms; in the plain, where I denounced her to the cock. In the town she fled from me amongst the bell-towers and the domes. Running like a beggar over the marble quays, I pursued her.

I caught her at the top of the road, near a laurel grove; and through her heavy veils I just felt the weight of her immense body! Dawn and the child fell at the foot of the wood.

When we awoke it was noon.

PRESS NOTICES.

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT.

Here we have a little troupe of nine singers, male and female. . . . They are none of them to be despised as verse writers; but they have not as a body very much in common.

The first five of them—Osbert and Edith Sitwell, Nancy Cunard, Arnold James and Iris Tree—certainly share a mood. They are, on the whole, dour and morose; they see nothing bright in the present, and no bright hopes in the future. Osbert Sitwell has grandiose and sinister visions, but in the description of them he tends to 'o'erleap himself'; he leaves an impression of not quite getting the effect he aims at. We should except, however, from this stricture 'Pierrot Old' and 'Night'—the latter a concise catalogue of darkling images from which one cannot escape. Dark and boding phantoms oppress the mind also of Nancy Cunard, who has not quite so fine an ear for phrase and rhythm as Mr. Sitwell. The deepening gloom of her little group of sonnets closes with a despairing gesture in two stanzas called 'From the Train.' Edith Sitwell we have met with before, and have yielded our tribute to the pitiless strength with which she probes human suffering or fashions nightmare shapes and fancies. Her 'The Mother' is a truly harrowing story, and 'Thaïs in Heaven' a shuddering piece of macabre. Arnold James has only three little pieces: he is gloomy, but one feels that one would like to hear more from him. Iris Tree is in a passion with the world. She voices, certainly with eloquence, a feverish desire to escape somewhere along 'the long road unto nothing' and a dolorous morbid hopelessness which, as a poetic *motif*, arouses rather pity than admiration.

All this studied and determined melancholy is, however, broken in upon by Mr. E. Wyndham Tennant with the rippling charm of 'Home Thoughts,' and the work of Mr. Tennant, one of the young officers of distinguished talent

whom the country has lost—or should we say gained?—in the war, is enough to give a real value to this collection. He and Mr. Victor Perowne are certainly the truest poets in the old sense—seekers after a simple fragrant beauty—in the whole company. Mr. Perowne's 'Lady of Shallott' is a beautiful ecstasy (a little reminiscent oddly enough of another Tennysonian poem, 'St. Agnes Eve,') and his 'Dirge' a very musicianly composition. Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell has but one short piece: and Helen Rootham, the ninth contributor, who is much concerned with the issues of life and death, speaks her thought in well-chosen phrase, yet hardly gives us enough to judge her by. She gives us, to close, 'Three Prose Poems' from the French of Jean Arthur Rimbaud.

THE MORNING POST.

Some of the poetical new births are certain to arouse the wrath of the mechanic, Victorian critics who have not learnt that poetry is not a sort of block cosmos but a living, growing creature. For example, 'Wheels,' which is an anthology of verse by a group of poets with a common confidence in the illuminated word and a common contempt for the look-see of the complacent academic, has aroused a little storm of obloquy. 'Precious,' 'macabre,' 'Baudelairian' are some of the epithets hurled at them, for there is nothing which irritates the hack-critic so much as the appearance of a new 'school' of poetry engaged in quietly working out its own conception of the art. In the work presented there is much achievement and more promise, and we have no doubt whatever that, fifty years hence, the publication of 'Wheels' will be remembered as a notable event in the inner history of English literature. Captain Osbert Sitwell's 'Babel' is a triumph in the dark, fantastical mode (indeed, it has the power of Thomson's 'City of Dreadful Night,') and must rank as one of the half-dozen finest war-poems. Lieut. Victor Perowne (whose poetical promise we remarked upon when reviewing a little Eton verse-book years ago) is also out of his ap-

prenticeship, while both Arnold James and the late Lieut. Wyndham Tennant, having something to say, have said it with the mystical tongue of a various sincerity. Of the women poets Helen Rootham strikes us as the most profound and accomplished, but the highly-figured verse of Edith Sitwell:

> The sounds seemed warring suns ; and music flowed
> As blood ; the mask'd lamps showed
>
> Tall houses, light had gilded like despair :
> Black windows, gaping there,

is also impressive, and there are striking passages in Iris Tree's long poem of illusion and disillusion :

> The long road unto nothing I will sing,
> Sing on one note, monotonous and dry,
> Of sameness, calmness, and the years that bring
> No more emotion than the fear to die.

'Wheels' must be read by all who are studying the way English literature is 'reacting' to the historic storm without —and whether they like it or like it not, the book is certain to have more influence in the future than a thousand critical brick-bats or bouquets.

THE OXFORD CHRONICLE.

The poets who have contributed to this anthology present such identity of mood and even imagery that it might seem that the mood and its emotion had been agreed upon, and was therefore not spontaneous but cultivated, were it not that the common chance which has caught them as fellow-victims of a world-disease is the obvious fount of each muse, and it is through deriving from water that is, alas! muddied that the poems are akin. The old traditional loves of the poets are far to seek. This verse does not dance with joy, but shivers with fear, creaks with menace, droops with despair. It is the work for the most part of very young people, and it is quite unbearably old. Its revelation is the grim fact that the dead are less dead than the living, that where the war has spared it has slain. Miss Iris Tree in particular, who, when she will,

can be the easy mistress of the haunting line, and, in her own phrase, catch 'fancy's fire' in 'the running swiftness of a rhyme,' concentrates instead on a fierce mood that invokes the worm 'that shall come at last to be my paramour,' and poises herself on a single note 'monotonous and dry.'

The anthology derives its title from this thought of Miss Nancy Cunard, whose symbolism is further elaborated in the work of Mr. Osbert Sitwell.

But Mr. Sitwell is a poet with too much energy for the fantastic symbolism of paper worlds and golden bladders, pantomime and pierrot. In 'The Beginning'—the chaos of creation—and 'The End' he piles up imagery till it well-nigh baffles apprehension, while in 'Night' and 'Black Mass' he gathers item by item, into a catalogue the inducings of human terror, and, making music of 'the evil things of night' leaves us full 'of that which makes one nigh to dead with fear.' Miss Edith Sitwell, though 'Antic Hay' shows how well she can command delight, and 'The King of China's Daughter' that she can be altogether charming, presents for preference a tale like 'The Mother' of black tragedy, or, as in the Lamentation from 'Saul,' verse, like Mr. Sitwell's, of accumulated imagery. Miss Cunard, like Miss Helen Rootham, is conquered happily by her own youth, so that the mood she would induce sits upon her only like the paper cap of one of her thousand clowns.

For the rest, there are Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell, who has moulded his medium skilfully to his picture; Mr. Victor Tait Perowne, whose loosely-woven little poems acquire an added clarity by their nearness to the packed line; and three poems, now familiar and prized from Wyndham Tennant, whose mind and method, philosophy and appeal, were alike foreign to the spirit, so perturbing and provoking, of this anthology.

THE LANCET

The camps and the trenches during the past two years have produced many copies of verses having claim to notice as beauti-

ful poetry, and 'Wheels,' though little of its contents may have been written in the circumstances of war, has an origin similar to that of the rapidly increasing war anthology. It is composed, speaking for its common and essential quality, of impressions suddenly seized and handed on by writers who are conscious of what has been suggested to themselves and who are determined to share the suggestion with others. The idea of these young poets is that the role of poetry is rather to crystalise fleeting views and aspects, to catch and fix vague and half-formed ideas, than to do any of the brave things associated in popular literature with the title of poet—to lead, to uplift, to amaze. The inspiration of these nine different writers—different in style, technique, and standard of accomplishment—has been a common one. They strive to show that any impression received by one person should be communicable to others by the medium of symbolic word-pictures. We recommend the book to lovers of verse.

THE SOUTHPORT GUARDIAN.

Of several new anthologies, 'Wheels' is the most distinctive. It is not easy to find the axle—'1916'—into which the several spokes of this wheel of verse fit; indeed, personal friendship rather than poetic kinship would seem to have been the sole condition for admission into the anthology. So here we have songs as diverse as the beautiful 'Home Thoughts in Laventie,' by the late Hon. E. Wyndham Tennant, to which we have made previous reference; and Osbert Sitwell's wonderfully realistic 'The Beginning,' showing the coming of order out of the chaos of creation, and 'The End,' a vivid picture of slimy horror as the world slips back into the void: between his picture of 'Night' and the rich promise of 'Pierrot Old,' a romantic narrative, and 'Twentieth Century Harlequinade.' . . . There is a feeling for nature in some of the poems of Arnold James; the consciousness of youth, its potentialities, its friendships, and its frustrations, are effectively expressed by Helen Rootham, while

in the three prose poems from the French she shows a subtle appreciation of moods and of words.

The most matured, and most perfect in feeling and in form, are the songs of Iris Tree, especially the 'If I were God.' With 'concentrated agony' she sings of 'the dullard masses,' the four last stanzas of the poem expressing all the disillusion and disappointment of youth with an almost morbid intensity.

MR. GOSSIP, THE DAILY SKETCH

But will it be poetry I wonder?

SOME OPINIONS.

THE WEEKLY DESPATCH.

The contents of 'Wheels'—an anthology of verse—suggests that a band of very young and cultured amateurs have conspired together to write poetry. The conspiracy has failed, despite a good deal of dark and sinister language. For instance, one of the conspirators, Osbert Sitwell, has seen the world's doom proclaimed by an evil lichen that is 'like blood dried brown upon a dead man's face.' He has also heard 'the nauseous flapping of Night's bat-like wings,' and knows the feeling when 'like scaly snakes, the hymn to evil writhes through the sub-conscious basis of our mind.' Some experience!

'Pull down the sun and burn the fiery moon,' cries another of the conspirators, Edith Sitwell, in frank defiance of lunar theories. Later on when we find that (chafing under the licensing restrictions of the Universe) 'the deserts cry unto the moon for rain' we realise that some new planet has swum into our ken. Victor Perowne knows a place where may be heard 'the roar of the world rushing down the wantways of the stars'; and Helen Rootham modestly admits she is young enough to 'seize each passing hour and fling it gaily where its fellows lie.'

Iris Tree (the daughter of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree) considers 'there are songs enough of love, of joy, of grief,' so she sings contemptuously:

> The dullard masses that no god can save!
> If I were God, to rise and strike you down

And break your churches in an angry wave
And make a furious bonfire of your town !

Other results of the deification of Iris Tree would be :

Passion high-pedestalled, pangs turned to treasure,
Perfected and undone and built afresh
With concentrated agony and Pleasure. . . .
If I were God, and not an ounce of flesh !

Iris Tree's lurid part in the conspiracy also includes a vision of 'the evening dipped knee-deep in blood,' and a kiss for

Mouth of the dust . . . corruption absolute,
Worm, that shall come at last to be my paramour.

To Nancy Cunard, daughter of Sir Bache and Lady Cunard, belongs the honour of having given the abortive plot the name which will identify it to literary posterity. She sometimes thinks

. . . that all our thoughts are wheels
Rolling forever through the painted world,
Moved by the cunning of a thousand clowns. . . .

This is not (as might be thought at first) a nasty dig at publishers, but merely a poetic fancy of the author, the strength of whose imagination may be judged from the sonnet in which she hears

Armies of corpses hid behind the wall
That creep and grind and tear each other's souls.

One feels that a poem containing Cunard lines like these deserve a stronger title than 'Uneasiness.' Nancy Cunard's boldest conspiratorial stroke, however, is the eight lines headed 'From the Train' :

Smoke-stacks, coal-stacks, hay-stacks, slack,
Colourless, scentless, pointless, dull ;
Railways, highways, roadways, black,
Grantham, Birmingham, Leeds and Hull.

Steamers, passengers, convoys, trains,
Merchandise travelling over the sea ;
Smut-filled streets and factory lanes,
What can these ever mean to me ?

The answer, of course (judging from the form in which the thesis is presented) is 'Nothing.' By the way, the price of the entertainment is half-a-crown, including tax.

THE ABERDEEN JOURNAL.

. . . An unsatisfying volume . . . that there is in evidence considerable poetic ability we willingly confess, but the ability is uncurbed in its choice of subject, and its imagination is unwholesome.

THE NEW STATESMAN.

. . . It is rather stupid to put a picture of a nursemaid wheeling a perambulator with a baby in it on the cover. None of the contributors can be quite so young as that.

COUNTRY LIFE

Most of them show their youth by taking a most sad and dismal view of this dim spot which men call earth. . . . One laughs.

THE LANCET.

'"Wheels" has no medical aspects whatever.'

THE PALL MALL GAZETTE.

. . . The fœtidness of the whole clings to the nostrils. . . .

THE COMMONWEALTH

A readable volume of thoughtful poems by sensible people who are able to write melodious verse and present poetic images while they philosophize about many things. There is not a dull page, and scarcely one which does not, incidentally, picture some charming rural scene, as it ponders upon the mysteries, joys, and pains of life.

THE ATHENÆUM.

Several of the contributors have produced some good work.

EVERYMAN.

The names of the poets are unfamiliar to us.

THE OBSERVER

The names speak for themselves.

THE SKETCH

Their names are sufficient to ensure a second edition.

THE WORLD.

The verses are of varying quality. . . . Miss Nancy Cunard is a member of a group of smart society girls.

Oxford: Printed by Rogers and Broome, Cowley S. John Press, 280 Cowley Road

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